

**AMERICAN DEMOCRACY AND
THE RULE OF LAW:
WHY EVERY VOTE MATTERS**

Something quite extraordinary happened halfway around the world from Frankfort, KY, just a few weeks ago, on Saturday, April 5th. On that day, Afghan voters turned out in large numbers for an historic Presidential and Provincial election. Threats of violence from the Taliban and poor weather could not stop them. CNN reported that day that Afghan lawmaker, Shukria Barakzai, stated that she was happy and proud because, “today is the day when the people of Afghanistan can go and vote freely”. ... “We are not afraid of the threats. As much as they kill us, we get stronger. As much as they killed our children, our journalists and innocent women, we say no, we will go and vote because we are fed up. We want to see real change. We want to enjoy our democracy.”

American, Afghan and other blood has been spilled so that this one event, this one day of the exercise of the free vote, could be accomplished. While some problems have been reported with the process and a run-off election may still be necessary, at least this first step toward democracy has occurred there.

The sacrifice of our military veterans and their families, some of who are undoubtedly among us today, has been an instrumental catalyst in this change towards democracy.

As in Afghanistan, American blood has been spilled in the pursuit of this truly democratic ideal here at home, beginning with the first shots fired in the Revolutionary War, through the War of 1812 and the Civil War, and continuing on through the present. President Lincoln described it so eloquently, as he consecrated the hallowed ground upon which so much American blood had been spilled, as the “government of the people, by the people, for the people”. The right to vote is the very cornerstone and foundation of **government by the people**. Our citizens’ participation in the political process, through the ballot box, ensures not only “government by the people”, but it also legitimizes the Rule of Law in this Commonwealth and in this nation.

As new admittees to this great Kentucky Bar, you are afforded the privilege of the ability to stand side-by-side, with our military, with our government and with our ordinary citizens to promote and defend our democratic ideals, the right to vote, and The Rule of Law. We must never take the right of access to the ballot box for granted!

I am not alone in this room, in the experience of my own Grandmother, born and raised just a few counties from here, who could not legally cast her ballot when she turned 18 years of age. It wasn’t until 1920, with the ratification of the 19th Amendment, that women, like my Grandmother, gained the right to vote. From that day forward, she never missed casting her ballot on election day and she admonished me to always do the same. **Every vote matters.**

And let us not forget that a mere 50 years before that, in 1870, the 15th Amendment was ratified, awarding all men the right to vote regardless of race or color. It took years to fully

embody the promises of the 15th Amendment – with the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Many of us present today have personal memories of the turmoil and bloodshed that was necessary to give full weight to the promise of the right to vote embodied in the 15th Amendment.

Every vote matters.

The lawyers present here today in this great Chamber, are in good stead, among the lawyers who have born and nurtured democracy. From Thomas Jefferson, to Abraham Lincoln, to Robert F. Kennedy, these lawyers and countless others, too numerous to name, devoted their lives to the formation and preservation of democracy and the right to vote.

Who stood up to tyrannical rule from across the ocean? Patriots and Lawyers.

Who stood up to the evils of slavery? Abolitionists and Lawyers.

Who stood up and assisted the suffragettes when they were incarcerated for demanding the right to vote? Other women and Lawyers.

Who stood up when the very spirit and intent of the 15th Amendment was under siege in the 1940's, 50's and 60's? Civil Rights Leaders and Lawyers.

In just a few minutes the new admittees in this Chamber will be administered the Oath to become a practicing attorney here in Kentucky. With this large privilege comes the equally large responsibility to stand ready and resolute to promote, nurture and defend The Rule of Law, in this great Commonwealth, in this great nation, and when possible, around the world.

The Rule of Law, our democratic government, and the right to vote are inextricably intertwined. These tenets of democracy stand as our fortress against terrorism, whether the threat emanates from within, or outside of, our borders.

You, new lawyers, will be blessed throughout your careers, with opportunities, large and small, to promote these rights and ideals. This mantle is passed to you today through the hard-work, vision and bloodshed of those who have gone before you. I know that each of you is worthy of this sacred trust, and I wish the best to each and every one of you throughout the journey.

Godspeed and Thank you!